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COMMERCE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0529

HENRY A. WAXMAN
29TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

July 9, 2001

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520-0229

Dear Secretary Powell,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by the Waqf, the Muslim religious trust charged with maintaining the area.

Over the past months, the Palestinian-controlled Waqf has overseen large-scale excavations around the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque involving indiscriminate digging and the removal and dumping of countless archeological artifacts dating back to the periods of the First and Second Jewish Temples, built by King Solomon and King Herod.

In the area known as "Solomon's Stables," reports indicate that the Waqf permitted unsupervised construction crews to bulldoze a hole more than 50 meters long, 25 meters wide, and 12 meters deep before removing more than 1,500 tons of earth full of shattered archeological artifacts to an of Kidron Valley garbage dump. Other devastating Waqf plans include paving over the northeastern parts of the Temple Mount near the "Mercy Gate," which would obstruct any future archeological exploration from taking place in the underlying area. Furthermore, the Israeli Antiquities Authority has been repeatedly denied access to the sites.

Just as the United States has spoken out against the Taliban's destruction of Buddhist heritage in Afghanistan, we must steadfastly reject the Palestinian Authority's ongoing campaign to deny Judeo-Christian roots in Jerusalem. The decimation of the Temple Mount's cultural and religious antiquities are an affront to Jews, Christians, archeologists, and communities worldwide, and may be an attempt to rewrite the Jewish historical presence.


The Mitchell Commission's cursory review of digging on the Temple Mount was not thorough enough. Although the commissioners accepted Palestinian claims that the projects were only renovations, I strongly believe that the United States must actively investigate and condemn the wanton use of heavy machinery, tractors, jack-hammers, and stone cutters in the area. These destructive tools are catastrophic to the delicate artifacts, architecture, and historical integrity of the place considered the crossroads of world religion.

I urge you to bring an end to this devastation by appealing to the leaders of the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia who have influence over the Waqf. I also ask that you instruct the U.S. representatives to the United Nations to raise this issue in all forums.

The Israelis and Palestinians are already embroiled in a violent and tense political conflict. Unless we do everything possible to protect the integrity of the Temple Mount, we will soon see the Waqf inciting a religious conflict as well.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress

cc: Ambassador James B. Cunningham